

STUDENTS FOR JUSTICE IN
PALESTINE, AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF HOUSTON; et al.,

V.

No. 1:24-CV-523-RP

DECLARATION OF DR. KELLY SOUCY

3. I hold a doctorate in leadership in higher education from the University of Texas at Austin, Master's of Social Work from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and a Master's of Art in College Student Personnel from Bowling Green State University.

4. In addition to these degrees, I have advanced training in Advance Violence Risk Assessment and Campus Threat Management from NaBITA, Threat Evaluation and Reporting Certification from Homeland Security, Title IX investigator training from ATIXA, and Green Dot Violence Prevention Instructor Certification. I am also a member of the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals.

5. I am familiar with the Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC), its organizational views, and its past events. At no time have I nor anyone I'm aware of acted against PSC because of its views. The Office of the Dean of Students has worked with PSC, including approving numerous events, to ensure its members can engage in expressive activity while abiding by our Institutional Rules.

6. In my experience, PSC sometimes follows the rules, and sometimes they push up to and/or cross the line. A good example of this was their behavior during the Israel Block Party on April 2, 2024. While PSC initially seemed focused on disrupting the event, they changed course when the Dean of Students staff told them this behavior was unacceptable. They avoided conduct charges at that time. Staff did, however, send them a letter warning, on April 15, 2024, that future violations, including failing to comply with directives of university officials, would result in consequences for the group.

7. On April 24, 2024, PSC chose to brazenly ignore this warning when it held its "Popular University for Gaza" over the staff's clear, repeated orders that the event could not proceed.

8. I was personally involved in responding to the Popular University event.

Before I describe what I saw, I want to push back against several misconceptions floating around about what occurred:

- PSC's views did not influence the decision to inform them that the Popular University event could not occur on April 24, 2024. This decision was based on evidence that the event would violate our rules and likely cause significant disruption on campus before final examinations.
- On April 24, 2024, in face-to-face meetings, I told PSC's leader multiple times that the event could not occur as planned and that the group needed to disperse from the area. He refused to follow directives and continued to lead the group. He marched the group onto Speedway to demonstrate, blocking the street and loudly yelling and chanting as planned. They impeded movement on Speedway and, generally, caused a scene. All of this occurred *before* the matter was turned over to law enforcement.
- Law enforcement gave PSC numerous orders to disperse before arrests began. While some left, most of the group kept marching, being extremely disruptive and trying to impede law enforcement from doing their jobs. For example, the group and its activities blocked many parts of the campus walkway. Others could not pass using the walkway area the group occupied. The noise outside of the classroom buildings was also deafening. The protestors surrounded law enforcement and tried to prevent them from removing arrestees from campus.
- PSC and its members displayed the most disruptive, belligerent, and aggressive behavior I have seen in my tens of years of experience in higher education. They repeatedly refused to comply with Dean of Student staff and law enforcement orders to disperse and occupied large campus areas. After hours of disrupting campus life on Speedway, they went to the South Lawn, erected an encampment, and refused to leave. The yelling and chanting were extremely loud, including using megaphones and drums, and could be heard inside academic buildings where students were studying or attending classes. Final examinations had to be moved from buildings around the South Lawn, and business units in the main buildings had to move from their usual locations.
- PSC received an interim action (meaning they could not reserve indoor space) pending an investigation because the group's behavior violated numerous rules, not because of their speech.

- The Governor's executive order, which was not included in our rules then, did not impact how my office responded to PSC's misconduct. Our motivation was to prevent serious disruption and hold the group and its members accountable for these egregious rule violations.

9. I am including images and video clips along with this declaration to help the Court understand how chaotic it was on campus during the event. They fairly and accurately depict what occurred on campus that day. They are as follows:

- Exhibit A (Initial Interactions Gregory Plaza)
- Exhibit B (Group Leaving Gregory and Marching Onto Speedway)
- Exhibit C (First Law Enforcement Dispersal Notice via Loudspeaker, Group to Exit by Going South on Speedway)
- Exhibit D (PSC Marching South Bound to Jester Circle & Brazos Street)
- Exhibit E (Protestors Return to Speedway North Bound, Not Dispersing Off of Campus)
- Exhibit F (Protestors Chose to Continue Protest by McCombs School of Business, Routes to Disperse Are Visible)
- Exhibit G (Protestors Amass on South Lawn, Southern View)
- Exhibit H (Protestors Amass on South Lawn, Northern View from Fountain)¹

The Lead-Up to the Popular University Event on April 24

10. The terrorist attack on October 7, 2024, and the subsequent conflict in Gaza have greatly impacted segments of our community. To support our students, the Office of the Dean of Students has outreached to students and spoke with religious leaders, from both Muslim and Jewish faiths, throughout the year. The primary goals of the outreach have been to offer academic accommodations, mental health resources, and safety planning related to local concerns.

11. During this time, our office was keeping a close eye on the coordinated effort to erect encampments at universities nationwide. These encampments featured

¹ Given their length, Exhibits G and H had to be cut into four videos.

yellow-vested guards stopping others from accessing public spaces, building occupations and vandalism, and outside agitators coming onto campus to participate in the action. Protestors refused to comply with orders and became aggressive, sometimes violent, towards staff and police just trying to do their jobs. These encampments also attracted outside groups, sometimes resulting in physical altercations between protest groups.

12. By April 22, 2024, leaders at places like Cal Poly Humboldt and Columbia seemed to have lost control of their encampments.² Sadly, what started on the coasts soon swept the country as part of a coordinated effort to prevent universities from functioning for political gain. And wherever these encampments were allowed to take root, significant disruption followed.

13. Shortly after the Columbia encampment began, National Students for Justice in Palestine (NSJP), a group associated with PSC, began pushing its groups to establish what it called a Popular University. In a series of posts on its website and Instagram, NSJP was clear: the Popular University was a vehicle to grind university operations to a halt using encampments to advance the NSJP's political aims.³

² *A Small Campus in the Redwoods Has the Nation's Most Entrenched Protest*, *The New York Times*, April 29, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/29/us/humboldt-protest-cal-poly.html>; *What We Know About the Protests and Arrests at Columbia University*, *The New York Times*, April 22, 2024 (updated May 1, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/22/us/columbia-university-protests.html>.

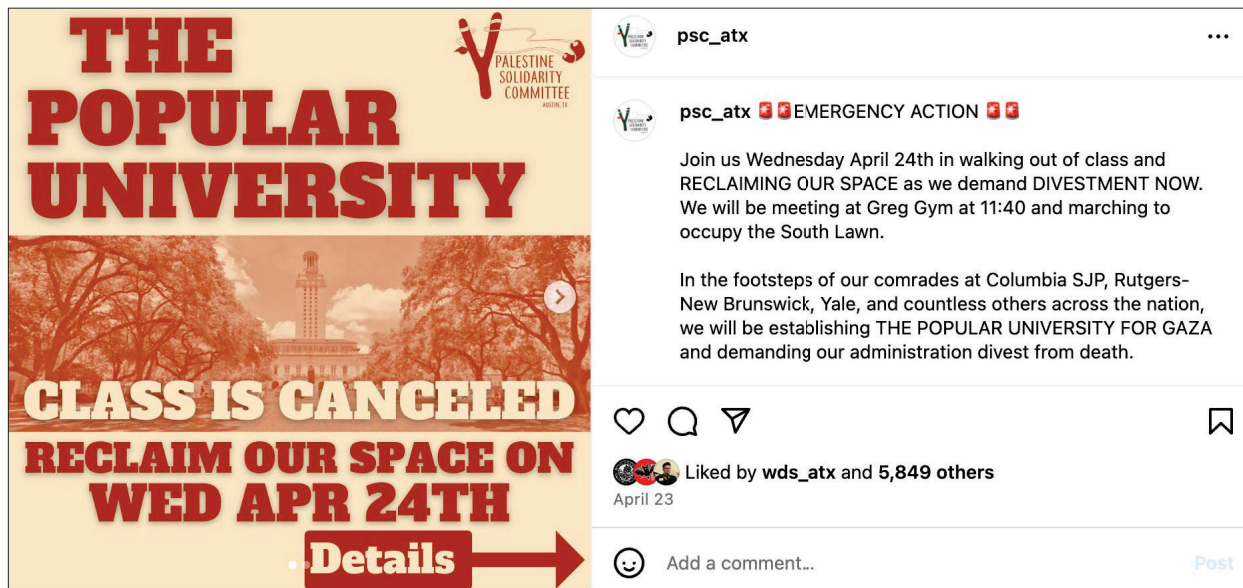
³ I am familiar with these social media accounts. I recognize these posts as connected to NSJP and PSC by the content of the posts and their associated homepage. These posts are still available on Instagram.





14. PSC quickly announced they would bring a Popular University to UT Austin on an unspecified date, copying NSJP's branding and messaging.

15. On April 23, 2024, as the number of encampments nationwide continued to swell, PSC posted on Instagram that its Popular University would occur the following day at noon. They would walk out of class and march to the South Lawn.



16. At this point, we reasonably believed that PSC's Popular University event posed a real risk to materially and substantially disrupt campus life. We also reasonably believed that it would entail serious violations of our rules.

17. Our office sent PSC a letter stating that the event could not occur as intended until the group met with administrators to determine a path forward. Neither PSC's political views nor Governor Abbott's executive order caused this cancellation.

18. Midmorning on April 24, 2024, Dr. Aaron Voyles, Executive Director for Student Involvement, and I approached Ammer Qaddumi, PSC's leader, outside the library. Dr. Voyles asked Mr. Qaddumi if they had received the letter. Mr. Qaddumi indicated they had, but that the event would continue, and they would not comply with the directive. I stepped in to express concern for their group's safety due to concerns witnessed at other campuses. I asked Mr. Qaddumi and the other leaders to disperse and cancel the event.

19. Despite our clear direction outside the library, PSC members and others began congregating down Speedway on Gregory Plaza shortly before noon, as planned. Mr. Qaddumi eventually joined them.

20. Many in the crowd wore masks, stocking caps, and scarves, presumably to hide their identities. We had seen social media posts encouraging individuals to hide their faces or tattoos during the protest to avoid identification. They refused to comply when staff asked them to identify themselves or produce a student ID as required by our rules. Every individual we asked to identify themselves disregarded

the directive. At this time, I spoke with Mr. Qaddumi, again, to indicate masks needed to be taken off and individuals needed to identify themselves. Mr. Qaddumi's fellow protestors began video-tapping my exchange with him and asked me to identify, to which I shared my full name and role.

21. I soon spotted tents, camping materials, and a large amplifier. We found Mr. Qaddumi to tell him, yet again, that the event could not proceed, the group needed to disperse immediately, and that these items needed to be removed at once. Except for briefly addressing the amplifier, he still wouldn't listen to our directions.

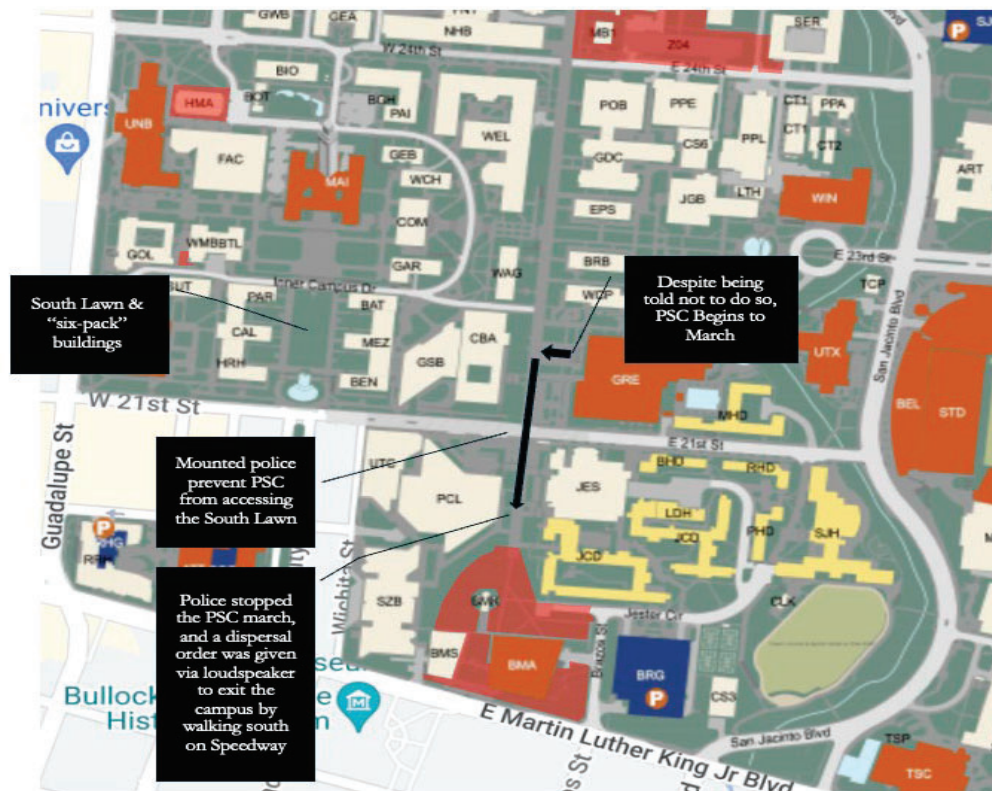


(Dr. Voyles and I, on the left, in orange shirts speaking with Mr. Qaddumi, on the right, with a black backpack)

22. PSC then began the event despite being told not to proceed at least four times. They marched in a large group onto Speedway, loudly chanting, holding signs, and carrying a large, red "Palestinian Solidarity Committee" banner. The people in yellow vests formed a protective barrier around the protestors.

23. When the group approached East 21 Street, which leads to the South Lawn, law enforcement, many of whom were not visible when the march started, stopped the group's progress. The protestors were extremely loud right next to the library and Jester West dormitory.

24. Using a loudspeaker, an officer told the group that their conduct violated Texas law and that they needed to leave within 10 minutes to avoid arrest. He stated that the group needed to leave to the south, away from the South Mall and the heart of campus. The officers stepped aside to allow the group to comply with the dispersal order by walking south on Speedway. Exhibits B and C are video clips showing this.



25. The group stopped at the corner of Jester Circle and Brazos to continue chanting. Police again stated that they needed to leave.⁴ While the group initially

⁴ MAI: Main Building & Tower; GRE: Gregory Gymnasium; CBA: College of Business Administration; JES: Jester Center; WAG: Waggener Hall; JCD: Jester Dormitory; PCL: Perry-Castañeda Library; BMA: Blanton Museum of Art; WCP: William Powers, Student Activities Center; BRB: Bernard & Audre Rapoport Building.

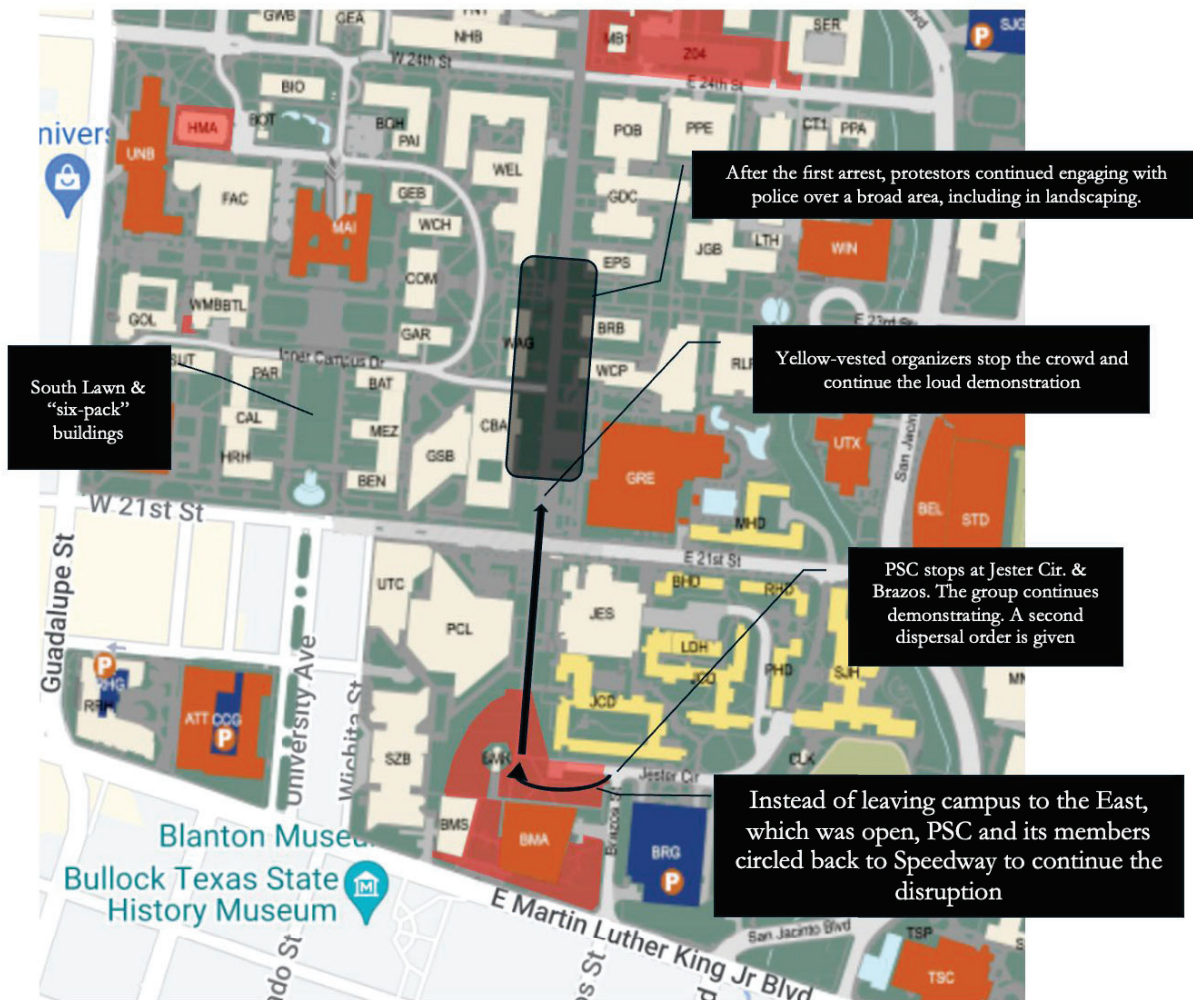
Declaration of Dr. Kelly Soucy



27. Police continued to order protestors to disperse. Hundreds surrounded police and, at times, blocked them by locking arms. Others were in the landscaping

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shouting and locking arms to prevent police from arresting people. This chaotic scene played out over several hours near several classroom buildings.

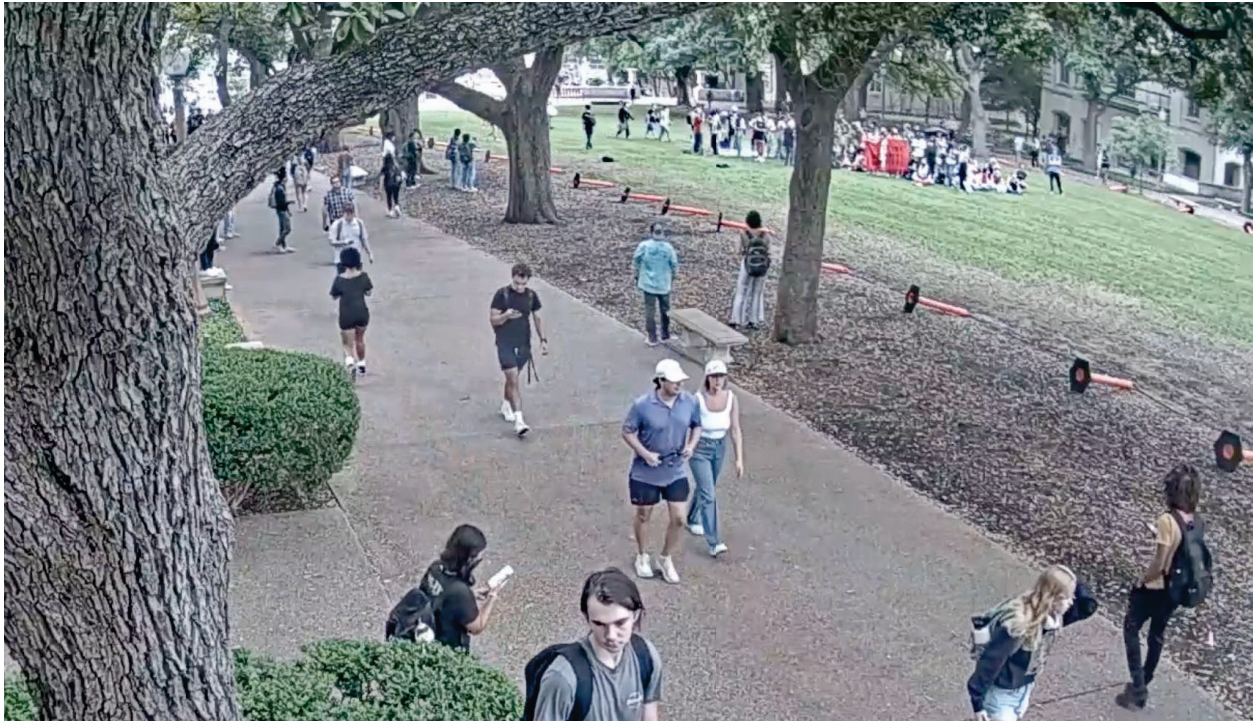


28. Besides, when they initially stopped the group, I did not observe any instances where protestors were not allowed to disperse from campus. Instead, they were choosing not to disperse.

29. PSC members carrying the red banner made it to the South Lawn through Batts Hall, where classrooms were in session. They knocked down all the temporary barriers around the area. Other protestors flooded the South Mall, loudly

yelling and chanting. They used a bullhorn and drums, some with speakers attached. Exhibit H should give the Court an idea of how loud it was that day.

30. Further dispersal orders were delivered via loudspeaker, text, email, and word of mouth. Yet the large group still wouldn't leave.





31. The South Lawn is in the heart of campus, surrounded by six classroom buildings that were in use that day. It is between iconic locations such as the Littlefield Fountain and the Tower. These areas are common stops for tours and soon-to-be graduates taking graduation photos with their families. PSC's takeover of the space negatively impacted both. The fact that graduates were not able to celebrate

with their families was particularly sad because this was the commencement class that was deprived of a high school graduation during the pandemic.

32. In addition, PSC's actions impacted numerous business units. Our office had to pull people away from their jobs doing things unrelated to demonstrations to help respond, and other units did the same. This was truly an all-hands-on-deck moment for staff from across the campus.

33. Relatedly, the Main Building had been secured during the protest. Due to this, students were unable to receive in-person services from the Texas One Stop or visit the Life Science Library to study for upcoming finals. As the protests continued through finals week, all exams from the buildings surrounding the South Mall were moved due to concerns of disruption.



34. When PSC erected tents, the Interim Dean of Students and I entered the unruly crowd to ask individuals to take down the tents. No one complied, so we

started to remove them. At this time, we were circled by individuals with cameras in our face shouting “You don’t belong here” and “It is unsafe for you to be here.” We decided to exit the situation due to the hostility.

35. Another round of dispersal orders followed. Hundreds of individuals remained. Officers then began removing the trespassers one at a time. After several hours, the lawn was clear and officers left the area. The crowd fizzled out, and those remaining eventually left the area later that night.

36. Our office issued a cease-and-desist letter to PSC shortly thereafter. The basis for this interim action was to investigate the flagrant, repeated rule violations we had witnessed the day prior. It had nothing to do with PSC’s speech or the executive order.

37. In the following days, more protests involving PSC and its members occurred. These events were totally different from what occurred on April 24, 2024. Excluding a few minor issues, the protestors held orderly, non-disruptive events that followed the Institutional Rules. Officials, therefore, had no reason to get involved.

38. On April 29, 2024, a group gathered on the South Lawn. They publicly advertised a benign-sounding schedule of events, including art projects. Because the group was not breaking any rules, officials did not prevent them from having their event.

39. However, around noon, the group set up tents, locked arms, and began yelling and chanting. When staff tried to intervene, protestors got aggressive with them. One staff member told them they could not have the tables and tents. He

grabbed one of the tables to keep it from being used as a weapon. At this time, he was pushed by a protester, at which point he lost hold of the table.

40. The group eventually latched their tables in a circle with chains, thick metal wire, and padlocks hidden in their coolers.

41. Soon, hundreds of protestors were engaging with the police. The police used bolt cutters to remove the locked chains from the tables and then began arresting the protestors one at a time to try to restore order.

42. It took several hours to arrest the unruly group on the lawn. When officers tried to transport the prisoners off campus, hundreds of people blocked the prisoner transport bus. They also began roving around campus, chanting, throwing objects at law enforcement officers and the prisoner transport bus, and slashing tires on police cars.

43. Once they could not stop the transport bus, approximately 20 protestors returned to the South Mall. They removed the single-panel barricades and used them to form a circle around themselves. A small group stayed on the South Mall until 10:36 p.m. without further incident.

44. As was the case on April 24, 2024, the University's response to this event was unrelated to the group's views or the executive order.

45. As a result of the protests on April 24 and 29, our office received around 498 student requests for class accommodations. They ranged from students who were unable to concentrate on their exam due to the disruption, others needing an

extension since April 29 was the last class day, and others not feeling they could be on-campus due to the disruption.

46. I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on 2024-08-19 | 12:03:15 CDT, 2024

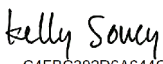
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Dr. Kelly Soucy
Executive Director of Student
Support and Deputy Title IX Coordinator
Office of the Dean of Students
University of Texas at Austin

EXHIBIT A

Initial Interactions at Gregory Plaza

This exhibit constitutes a video recording, a copy of which has been delivered to the Court.

EXHIBIT B

Group Leaving Gregory Plaza and Marching onto Speedway

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EXHIBIT C

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Protestors Chose to Continue Protest by McCombs School of Business, Routes to Disperse are Visible

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EXHIBIT G

Protestors Amass on South Lawn, Southern View

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EXHIBIT H

Protestors Amass on South Lawn, Northern View from Fountain

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